DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 222 942 CS 504 001

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TITLE Instructional Methods for Managing Speech Anxiety in the Classroom.
PUB DATE Nov 82
NOTE 22p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Speech Communication Association (68th, Louisville, KY, November 4-7, 1982).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Attitude Change; Behavior Patterns; *Classroom Techniques; *Communication Apprehension; *Communication Research; Feedback; Higher Education; *Public Speaking; *Speech Communication; *Student Attitudes; Student Teacher Relationship

ABSTRACT

A study was conducted to determine if communication apprehensive students enrolled in a basic speech communication course preferred specific instructional methods and perceived these methods as beneficial in reducing public speaking anxiety. During four consecutive semesters, 620 undergraduate students completed the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA) and indicated whether each of a number of instructional methods would help them feel more relaxed and comfortable when delivering their speeches in the course. Grading options, speech preparation procedures, speaking order options, topic selection procedures, and administration procedures were the types of instructional methods tested in the study. The results indicated that administration procedures (audience size, speech length) presented the most significant source of speech anxiety for communication apprehensive students. On the basis of these findings, apprehension about public speaking may be attributed to the process of speaking rather than the content of the speech or the skills of the speaker. However, the findings also demonstrated that apprehensive students prefer a number of procedures that may not always enhance their speaking skills. For example, some prefer that oral comments not be made after their speech. Instructors may counter such fears by explaining the importance of feedback as well as demonstrating it by insuring that sufficient time is available for oral comments between speeches. (HTH)

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INSTRUCTIONAL METHODS FOR MANAGING SPEECH ANXIETY IN THE CLASSROOM

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Presented Paper
Top Four - Instructional Development Division
Speech Communication Association
68th Annual Conference
Louisville, Kentucky, November 1982

ABSTRACT

This study was designed to test the public speaking preferences of apprehensive communicators. Fifty-three instructional methods were provided to the 620 subjects who participated in the four administrations of the study. Students rated whether these instructional methods would help them feel more relaxed and comfortable when speaking in public.

Results indicated that students apprehensive about public speaking rated over a third of the methods as helping them feel more relaxed and comfortable. Apprehensive speakers preferred a "mastery" approach that provided the opportunity of testing newly developed skills in less threatening situations before adapting these skills to more difficult speaking situations.

It was concluded that instructional methods should not be a substitute for skills training but a supplementary method for helping students develop basic public speaking skills within an environment in which stressful or fearful learning experiences are reduced.

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Instructional Methods For Managing Speech Anxiety In The Classroom

Introduction*

Speech communication educators have long recognized the importance of creating learning strategies conducive to helping beginning students feel relaxed and comfortable when developing speaking skills in the classroom. One of the most threatening of learning experiences for many students is the public speaking unit of the basic course. Researchers have tested various instructional methods for helping students develop public speaking skills including videotaping,[1] impromptu speaking,[2] and peer evaluations.[3]

Other researchers have investigated ways of reducing speech anxiety through specialized treatment programs.[4] However, most treatment programs are administered outside the normal structure of the basic course or are relegated to specialized sections of the basic course.[5]

Unfortunately, little research has been reported on ways to reduce speech anxiety in the classroom. A recent issue of Communication Education was devoted to developing safe and nonthreatening classroom communication environments;[6] however, research demonstrating the effectiveness of these environmental modifications and other methods has seldom been reported in the

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*The first 24 of the 53 instructional methods tested in this study were reported in a paper presented at WSCA Conference 1982 (Denver) entitled, "The Public Speaking Preferences of Apprehensive Communicators."

literature. Furthermore, textbooks on public speaking typically list commonly assumed "cures" for stagefright that have rarely been empirically investigated.

Undoubtedly, many of these techniques may help both experienced and inexperienced speakers reduce their speech anxiety. However, public speaking is similar to many other skills that require time to learn. Just as one would not attempt calculus until algebra has been mastered, one would probably not do as well speaking in front of a large audience until practice has been gained in speaking before a smaller group of people.

For many students who enroll in a basic speech course, it is their first experience speaking in front of an audience of any size. Thus, it is important that the first speech be as nonthreatening as possible. Once the student has practiced and mastered some of the basic skills before a smaller group of people, he (she may feel more comfortable and confident in testing these skills before a larger audience.

Research in speech communication offers a rationale for proceeding from the basic to the more difficult speaking experience. For instance, Barnes has shown that apprehensive students are often "traumatized" by their initial experience in public speaking and actually are more apprehensive about speaking after presenting their first speech.[7] Other research has shown that apprehensive students are often so anxious about speaking that they drop their public speaking course before the first speech assignment.[8]

The emphasis in the basic speech course is frequently placed on developing speaking skills that will help students

become more confident and expressive communicators. Unfortunately, it is seldom reported that the way in which speech skills are learned and practiced also may contribute to the reduction of speech anxiety. Earlier theorizing in stagefright, for instance, concluded that any teaching method will help to alleviate speech anxiety.[9] Investigations of stagefright have typically led to the following kind of conclusion:

> Upon the basis of these findings, the only recommendation about stagefright alleviation in the classroom is that students should have training and experience in the classroom.[10]

Although the above recommendation may hold true for most students, for the apprehensive student experience may end in trauma or withdrawal from the course. This study was interested in examining the apprehensive students' attitudes toward public speaking instruction. Emphasis was placed on the structure rather than the content of the public speaking unit. The purpose of the study, therefore, was to determine if apprehensive students enrolled in a basic course preferred specific instructional methods and perceived these methods as beneficial in making public speaking less threatening.

Method

Subjects consisted of 620 undergraduates enrolled in two of the basic courses at the University of Hawaii during the 1981-82 academic year. Four different groups of students participated in the study over four consecutive semesters. Between 135 and 180 students participated in one of the four administrations of the study. The total sample consisted of 337 females and 283 males.

Communication apprehension level of the subjects was determined by administration of the Personal Report of Communication Apprehension (PRCA). The PRCA twenty-item inventory was selected because the majority of its scales are directed toward speech anxiety. Subjects also rated a list of twelve to sixteen instructional methods compiled by the authors. Subjects were requested to indicate whether the methods would help them feel more relaxed and comfortable when delivering their speeches in the course. Ratings of the instructional methods were measured with Likert-type scales similar to those of the PRCA.

Five types of instructional methods were tested in the study:

(1) Grading Procedures: Subjects were provided methods from which to select their preferences regarding grading of speeches (e.g., "I would prefer my test grades count more toward my final grade in the course than my speech grades").

(2) Speech Preparation Procedures: Subjects rated methods designed to provide skills training prior to speech presentation (e.g., "I would like a lecture explaining ways I can use my body and my voice expressively before giving my first speech").

(3) Speaking Order Procedures: Methods were provided the students from which they rated their preferences for the order of presentation. They included options ranging from volunteering to speak to speaking after the majority of the class had already spoken (e.g., "I would prefer

giving my speech after almost everyone else had given their speeches").

(4) Topic Selection Procedures: Methods were provided the subjects concerning the types of speeches they most preferred to deliver. The types of speeches ranged from impromptu and persuasive speaking to relating a personal experience or introducing another student to the class (e.g., "I would feel more comfortable giving a humorous speech than a persuasive speech").

(5) Administration Procedures: Subjects also were provided a list of procedures to rate concerning such items as the amount of time they wished to speak, whether they preferred speaking before just half the class, and whether they preferred using a lecturn while speaking (e.g., "I think I would feel more comfortable if my first speaking experience in front of the class was a small group report").

The PRCA and the list of instructional methods were administered the first day of class of each semester. The fifty-three instructional methods are provided in the appendix of this paper.

Pre- and post-PRCA scores were not compared since the immediate purpose of this study was only to establish whether students preferred certain instructional methods. Therefore, none was subsequently tested in class as a method mediating speech anxiety.

Statistical treatment included analysis of variance and Pearson correlations. Analysis of variance was employed to determine whether mean scores of the instructional methods were significantly different among levels of apprehension. In this

study, apprehension was labeled as follows: (1) Low apprehension = 0-50, (2) Average apprehension = 51-70, (3) High apprehension = 71-100. These ranges are consistent with normative data derived for the PRCA.[11] Item-to-total correlations between the PRCA and the instructional methods were computed, as were total-to-total correlations between the PRCA and the summated score for the instructional methods scales. Multivariate methods (e.g., discriminant and factor analysis) were not selected because it was believed they would be more suitable once a final list of instructional methods was derived through preliminary testing.

Results

Findings in this study yielded significant differences on all five types of instructional methods tested. Overall results indicated that nineteen of the fifty-three methods yielded significant mean differences between low and high apprehensive speakers. An additional five methods were significant at the .09 level of confidence.

Significance was observed with one of the six speaking order procedures. Apprehensive speakers preferred not volunteering to speak (F-value = 7.36, p = .01). However, three additional speech order procedures approached significance. Although apprehensive speakers preferred not being among the first students in class to speak (F-value = 2.34, p = .09), they did prefer knowing the exact order in which they had been assigned to speak (F-value = 2.29, p = .09) and preferred waiting until half the class had already spoken before delivering their speech (F-value = 2.08, p = .09). Table 1 reports results for volunteering to speak.

Of the thirteen evaluation procedures tested for grading the speeches, significance was observed with four of them. The apprehensive speakers stated they would prefer receiving an automatic 10 points for delivering their first speech (F-value = 9.54, p = .001), that their first speech not be graded on how well they deliver the speech (F-value = 5.14, p = .01), that their speech grades count less than their test grades (F-value = 17.06, p = .001), and that the class and instructor not orally comment on their speech (F-value = 4.54, p = .02). Since the findings were similar for all four procedures, Table 2 will report only results for the effects of apprehension on the weighting of speech versus test grades. One additional evaluation procedure (i.e., "not having too many criteria to execute or perform") also was preferred by apprehensive students (F-value = 2.48, p = .09).

The third set of instructional methods, skills preparation procedures, yielded significance with only two of the fifteen procedures tested. The apprehensive speakers preferred not having their first speech videotaped (F-value = 7.36, p = .001). However, they did prefer turning in an outline to be approved by the instructor prior to delivering the speech. Table 3 reports the effects of apprehension on videotaping.

Significance also was observed with four of the ten topic selection procedures. Specifically, high apprehensive speakers preferred not to deliver an impromptu speech (F-value = 8.19, p = .001) or a speech in which they related a personal experience to the class (F-value = 8.66, p = .001). In addition, they preferred not to speak on a topic on which another had spoken (F-value = 5.16, p = .01) and would rather give an informative

than a persuasive speech (F-value = 5.57, p = .01). Table 4 reports preferences among levels of apprehension for presenting an impromptu speech.

Eight of the nine speech administration procedures yielded significant differences for apprehension level. Students apprehensive about public speaking preferred their first speech be delivered to just half the class (F-value = 5.36, p = .01) or given from their seat with the class seated in a circle (F-value = 18.19, p = .001) or that the format of the first speech include a small group report to the class (F-value = 6.68, p = .01). Other administrative procedures selected by the apprehensive students included having 5 rather than 10 minutes to speak (F-value = 14.51, p = .001), that they speak with the aid of a lecturn (F-value = 6.34, p = .01), that they not have to follow an excellent speech (F-value = 13.96, p = .001), that the class not ask questions as they speak (F-value = 3.98, p = .02), and that they introduce a classmate for the first speech (F-value = 5.51, p = .01).

Item-to-total correlations between the PRCA and individual instructional methods ranged from .02 to .53. The highest correlations were observed with the methods yielding significant analysis of variance results (i.e., for these methods, the item-to-total correlations ranged from .21 to .53). Total-to-total correlations between the PRCA and summated procedure scores in each of the four studies ranged from .18 to .41.

Conclusions

Findings in this study demonstrate that various instructional methods are perceived by apprehensive students as helping them

feel more relaxed and comfortable when gaining experience in public speaking. Apprehensive students preferred a "mastery" approach to the public speaking unit of the basic course that allows them to experiment with speech skills before testing these skills in more threatening situations. Also, they feel that speech skills are best learned by performing intermediate behaviors (e.g., speaking before half the class rather than before the entire class) that gradually prepare them for more difficult situations.

Findings may be summarized through the following conclusions: (1) waiting to speak is not a factor contributing to speech anxiety, although there does appear to be a slight preference for particular speaking orders, (2) evaluation apprehension appears to contribute to speech anxiety, (3) speech skills deficiency does not appear to represent a significant factor contributing to anxiety since only 2 of 15 skills procedures were preferred by apprehensive speakers, (4) immediate oral feedback is a factor contributing to speech anxiety since apprehensive speakers prefer that comments not be made publicly about their speech, (5) peer comparisons do contribute to anxiety since apprehensives prefer not to follow an excellent speaker or speak on the same topic as another, (6) situational difficulty contributes to anxiety since the apprehensive student prefers an informative to a persuasive or an impromptu speech and would rather speak for just 5 minutes and before only half the class, and (7) becoming the center of attention appears to contribute to speech anxiety as apprehensive speakers prefer to deliver their first speech as part of a small group report, not to relate a personal experience to the audience, and to present

their first speech seated with the audience sitting in a circle.

Collectively, findings from this study indicate that administration of the public speaking unit represents the single most significant source of speech anxiety for the apprehensive speaker. Speech administration procedures accounted for over 40% of the significant differences in the study, yet the administration items accounted for only 17% of the total sample of items tested. More specifically, significance was observed with 90% of the speech administration procedures, more than twice the percentage of the next highest dimension tested (i.e., topic selection yielded significance with only 40% of its scales).

On the basis of these findings, apprehension about public speaking may be attributed to the process of speaking rather than the content of the speech or the skills of the speaker. That is, for most apprehensive students, the fear of public speaking appears to be grounded in insufficient experience speaking in front of an audience rather than the "skill deficiencies" tested in this study.

These findings should not be interpreted as a suggestion that speech skills training is a less important factor in developing speech confidence and competence than the structure of the public speaking unit. No teaching method should diminish students' appreciation of the complexity and challenge of effective speech. Instead, these methods should be viewed as supplementary practices that provide the most comfortable environment in which stressful or fearful learning experiences are reduced.

The findings further demonstrate that apprehensive students prefer a number of procedures which, if utilized by the instructor,

may not always enhance their speaking skills. For example, although some may prefer that oral comments not be made after their speech, feedback about the speech is often as important as delivering the speech itself. Without feedback, students cannot measure their effectiveness or understand how well their speech was received by the audience.

Instructors may counter the fears of students by explaining the importance of feedback as well as demonstrating it by insuring that sufficient time is available for oral comments between speeches. The instructor also may be sensitive to the needs of students by suggesting that following an excellent speech will not hamper their ability to speak, by ensuring that a lecturn is present, and by not requiring apprehensive students to speak first.

In conclusion, the results from this study suggest that speech anxiety may be mediated through a variety of instructional methods. Therefore, findings for which significance was observed will be tested in a follow-up investigation in which multivariate methods may now be more appropriate in identifying the most discriminating factors that define the speech anxiety construct. These factors should result in better decisions for managing speech anxiety in the classroom.

NOTES

[1]An edition of the Speech Teacher (Vol. 17, 1968) focused on various instructional uses of videotaping.

[2]J. A. Hendrix, "The Impromptu Classroom Speech," Speech Teacher 17 (1968) 334-335.

[3]Gordon Wiseman and Larry Barker, "Peer Group Instruction: What Is It?" Speech Teacher 15 (1966) 220-223.

[4]Various methods of specialized instruction have been proposed including systematic desensitization, rhetoritherapy, and cognitive restructuring. See William T. Page, "Reviews of Teaching/Learning Resources," Communication Education 27 (1978) 359-361.

[5]Herman Cohen, "Teaching Reticent Students in a Required Course," Communication Education 29 (1980) 222-228.

[6]Communication Education 29 (1980) 213-263.

[7]R. E. Barnes, "Interpersonal Anxiety Approaches to Reducing Speech Anxiety," (Paper presented to the Central States Speech Association conference, Chicago, 1976).

[8]James C. McCroskey, David C. Ralph, and James E. Barrick, "The Effect of Systematic Desensitization on Speech Anxiety," Speech Teacher 19 (1970) 32-36.

[9]Edward R. Robinson, "What Can The Speech Teacher Do About Students' Stagefright," Speech Teacher 8 (1959) 8-14.

[10]Robinson, p. 11.

[11]James C. McCroskey, "Measures of Communication-Bound Anxiety," Speech Monographs 37 (1970) 269-277.

Table 1

Effects of Apprehension on

Volunteering to Speak

SOURCE	df	SS	MS	F-value
Communication Apprehension	2	15.96	7.98	7.36*

Submeans: Low Apprehension (n=29) 3.79 Average Apprehension (n=93) 3.50
High Apprehension (n=33) 2.90

*p = .001 (S-Method = HA > AA and LA)

Table 2

Effects of Apprehension on

Speech vs. Test Grades

SOURCE	df	SS	MS	F-value
Communication Apprehension	2	35.69	17.84	17.05*

Submeans: Low Apprehension (n=22) 3.77 Average Apprehension (n=80) 2.95
High Apprehension (n=33) 2.15

*p = .001 (S-Method = HA > AA and LA; AA > LA)

Table 3

Effects of Apprehension on

Videotaping

SOURCE	df	SS	MS	F-value
Communication Apprehension	2	14.27	7.13	5.72*

Submeans: Low Apprehension (n=22) 3.48 Average Apprehension (n=80) 3.56
High Apprehension (n=33) 2.78

*p = .004 (S-Method = HA > AA and LA)

Table 4

Effects of Apprehension on

Impromptu Speaking

SOURCE	df	SS	MS	F-value
Communication Apprehension	2	24.20	12.10	8.19*
Submeans:	Low Apprehension (n=30) 3.90 Average Apprehension (n=107) 3.51 High Apprehension (n=41) 2.79			

*p = .01 (S-Method = HA > LA)

PUBLIC SPEAKING QUESTIONNAIRE

The following statements describe some preferences which may or may not help you feel more comfortable in your public speaking assignments. Please read each statement and decide if any will apply to you personally in your public speaking this semester.

There are no "right" or "wrong" answers to any of these statements, only personal preferences which you feel relate to you. Therefore, please give your first reactions to the statements (even though your preferences may change later in the semester).

Please use the following scale in recording your preferences:

1=Strongly Agree 2=Agree 3=Uncertain 4=Disagree 5=Strongly Disagree

*1. If I had a choice, I would volunteer to speak rather than waiting to be called on to speak by the instructor.

*2. I would prefer not speaking on a topic on which another student had already spoken.

**3. I would like to be among the first speakers in class before most others have given their speeches.

4. I would like the instructor to wait until after I have delivered my first speech before lecturing about techniques of speech delivery.

*5. After I have finished speaking, I would prefer the class or instructor not to comment orally on my speech.

**6. I would feel more comfortable the day of my speech if I knew the exact order in which the speakers had been assigned to speak.

7. I would prefer giving an ungraded practice speech before being graded on any of my speeches.

*8. I would rather give a speech trying to persuade the class than I would giving a speech to inform the class.

*9. I would prefer giving my first speech to just half the class before having to speak before the entire class.

**10. If I had a choice, I would prefer speaking on a topic assigned by the instructor rather than selecting my own speech topic.

*11. I would not mind speaking immediately after another student delivered a very good speech.

12. I would like to work within a small group of students so that I could explain my speech topic and get some additional suggestions before having to deliver the speech before the class.

*13. I would prefer not using the podium so that I won't have to stand in one spot as I am speaking.

14. I don't think that using visual aids (such as charts and graphs) will help me feel more comfortable while speaking.

**15. I would prefer giving my speech after half the students in the class have already spoken.

*16. I would like to have my first speech videotaped so that I can get to see myself before giving my second speech.

17. I would prefer that the instructor not write comments on his or her evaluation sheet as I am speaking.

*18. I would feel more comfortable if I had 10 minutes to give my speech instead of just 5 minutes.

19. I would like to hear a sample speech before giving my first speech in class.

*20. I would prefer the public speeches to count more toward my final grade in the course than my test grades.

21. I would rather be graded by my instructor than my classmates on my first speech.

22. I think I would feel more comfortable if the instructor required a written outline of my speech a few days before I was assigned to speak so that I could get some feedback before delivering my speech.

23. I would prefer other kinds of speaking assignments (such as interviewing and small group discussion) before the public speaking assignments.

24. I think that getting to know some of the other students in the class would help me feel more comfortable when I give my first speech.

25. I would like a lecture explaining ways I can use my body and my voice expressively before giving my first speech.

26. I would like the instructor to conduct a poll of the class so I could get some idea what topic the class considers most interesting.

*27. For my first speech, I would like to give a speech in which I introduced one of my classmates to the rest of the class.

*28. I would enjoy giving a speech in which I was required to relate a personal story or experience to the audience.

29. I would like to give two speeches on the same topic so that I could incorporate some of the suggestions the class offered on the first speech for improving my second speech.

30. I think I would feel more comfortable giving a humorous speech rather than a persuasive speech.

**31. I would feel more comfortable during my first speech if the instructor did not have too many criteria that he or she expected me to perform or execute.

32. I think a lecture on ways to organize my speech would help me feel more confident about giving my first speech.

33. I would like to practice reading some speeches before actually giving my first speech so that I could learn how to use my voice as expressively as possible while speaking.

34. I would like a copy of the grading form the instructor will be using before I give my speeches so that I know what to expect ahead of time.

*35. I think I would feel more comfortable if my first speaking experience was a small group report to the class.

*36. I think a 2-3 minute inpromptu speech (i.e. one in which the instructor assigns a topic and gives the student a few minutes to prepare what to say) would be a good assignment to require.

37. I would like to learn techniques for projecting my personality while speaking before the class.

*38. I would prefer my first speech be graded on how well I deliver my speech rather than the content I present in the speech.

39. I would prefer that the instructor grade my speeches even if other students are required to provide either oral or written comments on the speeches.

*40. I think I would feel more comfortable about giving my first speech if I could remain seated and have the class sit in a circle.

*41. I would enjoy delivering a speech where the audience could raise their hands and ask questions as I was speaking.

*42. I think I would feel more confident about giving a speech if I could use a well-prepared outline that the instructor reviewed and approved before I give the speech.

43. The instructor should establish a limited range of topics for the first speech so that I will have some idea what to talk about.

44. I would prefer speaking on a topic on which the audience was not well-informed or had very little knowledge.

45. I think the second speech should be graded more heavily than the first speech on how well I use delivery techniques (e.g. maintaining eye contact, vocal variety, speaking rate).

46. I would like the instructor to schedule individual conferences with all students to talk about the first speech before it is presented in class.

*47. I would feel more comfortable about giving my first speech if every student received an automatic 10 points for delivering the speech--even if some speeches were better than others.

48. I would prefer that half of my speech grade be determined by the instructor and the other half of my grade by the students.

49. I would prefer that the instructor require everyone be prepared to speak on the same day so that he or she could call on students at random to speak.

50. I would feel more comfortable about my first speech if I could inform the audience about my academic major or intended career options.

51. I would prefer giving my speech after almost everyone else in the class had already given their speeches.

52. I would like the instructor to provide me with written comments about my delivery skills so that I can make some improvements before my second speech.

53. I would rather be graded by my classmates than the instructor on my first speech.

*p = .05

**p = .10